



The Art of The Snare Drum

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Preface

Imagine that you want your tongue as sharp as a samurai's katana. You decide that you have a lot of great ideas to share and wish to share them in an eloquent manner. As you face your first live audience, you find yourself fumbling through your words. You can feel your anxiety mounting as beads of sweat start to form on your forehead. Your face turns bright red as you can feel the audience's piercing gaze. As you conclude your presentation to a tepid response, you trudge back to your seat, discouraged and humiliated. As the realization washes over you that your tongue is as dull as a rusty nail, you ask yourself how this could have happened? "Why was I not able to articulate what I was feeling"?

A stupendous speech and a fiery performance on a snare drum are no different. To be a great public speaker, you must consistently articulate your thoughts and feelings. The key term in this sentence is consistency. Great speakers are not born but developed through hours of hard work and practice. It's the hours of preparation that leads to a consistent performance. Learned skills such as developing a strong vocabulary, reading the room, and developing a strong attention grabber allow individuals to become better speakers. Becoming a great percussionist follows the same process. Without proper training, a night on the bandstand can end in disaster, not too dissimilar to that of a cringe worthy speech. If your hands can't play what your brain is thinking, then expect a short career as a musician.

Fortunately, this book is designed to create a comprehensive guide on what it takes to develop great hand technique on the snare drum. Once you master the techniques in this book, playing the snare will become effortless and enjoyable. The instrument will no longer serve to annoy your neighbors but become a tool in which to craft beautiful music.

The goal of this book is to educate you on three specific percussive techniques. Once mastered, these techniques will provide you with the qualities of a great percussionist. These qualities include speed, endurance, and control. The three techniques that we will be covering are the level system, the Moeller system, and finger control. Each technique develops a different part of your body and should all be learned in a specific order (Morello, 2006). For instance, the level system will develop your wrists and should be learned first. The Moeller system will develop your forearms and should be learned second. Lastly, finger control will develop your fingers and should be learned third in the sequence.



The principal philosophy of this book is to educate you on playing the snare drum with a loose and relaxed mind set (Johnson, 2012). Your drumsticks should never be gripped tightly, your muscles should never be tense, and brute force should never be used to play the instrument.

Dynamic control, blistering speed, and consistent endurance come from physics and leverage, not bulging biceps. As described by renowned educator Jeffery Johnson, playing while loose and relaxed will facilitate the flow of music, not disrupt it. If you wish to harness complete control of your drumsticks and amaze your family and friends with your virtuosity, please read on.



Disclaimer

The information in this book should be treated as supplemental material, created to build off existing percussive knowledge. Although the techniques and philosophies in this book are an excellent way to develop sound technique, there are multiple ways to approach playing the snare drum. If you are already having success with techniques of your own, don't reinvent the wheel. Instead take from this book what is lacking in your playing and discard the information that you already have.

Key Term for Chapter 1

A popular term that is used throughout this book is “sticking”. Sticking details which hand is being used to make a stroke or hit on the drum. Any strokes with the right hand will be marked as “R”, and any strokes with the left hand will be marked as “L”.

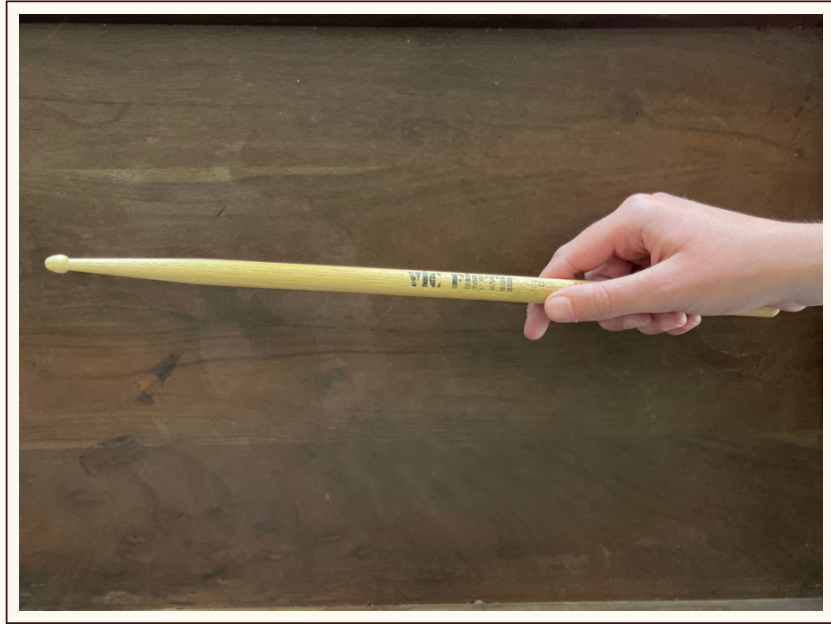
Chapter One: *Stick Grip and Snare Drum Basics*

Approach holding your drumsticks like you would a “fledgling bird”, loose and relaxed (Chapin, 2000). This unique and insightful analogy was spoken by legendary drummer Jim Chapin. As touched upon in the preface, it’s important that we work with our body and not against it to prevent injury (Morello, 2006). Although anyone can pick up a pair of drumsticks, history has shown us that certain grips yield better results (Natelli, n.d.). In fact, gripping a stick too tightly or having a death grip can lead to repetitive motion injuries such as tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome (Azar, 2021). Tendonitis is defined as an inflammation of a tendon which acts as a bridge between muscle and bone. Tendonitis can plague any tendon in the body but is common in the wrists and thumbs of a percussionist. Tendonitis can present as chronic or acute, causing sharp pain with its acute form and dull achy pain with its chronic form. Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when the median nerve is pressed down. As this nerve becomes compressed, it has a hard time making its way through the tiny space that is formed by the bones of the wrist and the transverse carpal ligament (Azar, 2021). Symptoms of carpal tunnel include a burning, numbing, and tingling sensation on the side of the hand. These symptoms are most prevalent in the extremities. Although these two ailments sound ghastly, this is the reality of grasping your drumsticks too tightly. Fortunately, these injuries can be prevented with proper grip and sound technique.

Although gripping a drumstick may seem intimidating, it's an easy process that even the “greenest” of players can learn. The key to a great grip resides in a natural and ergonomically sound hand position. As we will discuss momentarily, a textbook drumming grip is user friendly and something that will become second nature very quickly.

There are two main ways in which you can hold a pair of drumsticks, matched grip, and traditional grip (Jain, 2007). Matched grip is intuitively named, indicating that both drumsticks “match” or mirror one another in each hand. As described by (Jain, 2007), our instinct is to hold our first pair of sticks in a “matched” fashion. Players can also use traditional grip. This grip was pioneered in the 18th century to accommodate the awkwardness of an off kilter marching field drum (Jain, 2007). Players at that time would march with their snare drum on a sling, causing the drum to tilt at an angle. The traditional grip allowed better access to this less accommodating position. The traditional grip is grasped in your weaker hand with your dominant hand maintaining a matched grip. Both grips are great for playing the snare drum and it will behoove you to experiment with both (Johnson, 2012).

Matched Grip



According to (Morello, 2006), you should approach setting up your matched grip by first dangling your hands by your sides. Once you have achieved this, bring up your forearms so that your wrists are hanging limp in front of you. From this position, gently place a drum stick in your hand and close your bottom three fingers. You should observe your drumstick lying on the small knuckle of your index finger with your thumb lying flush on the stick. Your thumb can also be slightly off center. Your index finger should not be wrapped around the stick but dangle off to the side. Your hand should also generate a small space between your index finger and thumb.

Traditional Grip



Your traditional grip can also be set up in a similar fashion (Morello, 2006). Once again, relax your hands and let them fall by your sides. Bring up your forearms but this time pretend that you are about to engage in a handshake with your less dominant hand. Place your drumstick in the fleshly webbing that exists between your index finger and thumb. At this point, place your ring finger under the stick so that the stick is resting on the cuticle of the fingernail. Let your index finger naturally curl in so that it is on top of the drumstick. Complete the grip by gently placing your thumb on top of the big knuckle of your index finger.

According to Jain, “the fulcrum is the point where the stick is balanced without the aid of other fingers and can achieve maximum rebound from the drum”. For matched grip, the fulcrum resides between the index finger and thumb or the middle finger and thumb (Jain, 2007). The motion that is used to pilot the matched grip is an up and down motion of the wrist, like knocking on a door. The fulcrum for traditional grip lies between the fleshy webbing of the index finger and thumb. The motion for traditional grip is a horizontal turn of the wrist, like turning a doorknob (Jain, 2007).

Along with matched grip and traditional grip, there are three sub grips that are to be learned as well. These three grips are known as German grip, French grip, and American grip. These grips are defined by varying wrist and forearm placement and are crucial in becoming a master of the snare drum (Natelli, n.d.).

German Grip



German grip requires that your hands and wrists are in constant alignment with your forearms (Soph, 1986). The grip is loose with the percussionists' fingers wrapped gingerly around the stick. Soph also claims that the "butt" end of the stick should "protrude" out the side of the percussionist's hand. The grip should create a pizza slice shaped triangle over the drumhead all the while using the wrists and fingers to help move the stick up and down (Natelli, n.d.). This grip can generate the most power out of the three.

French Grip



The second of the three grips is the French grip and it is the opposite hand position of German grip. With French grip, turn your palms inward to face one another with your thumb on top of the stick facing the ceiling (Soph, 1986). The French grip uses your fingers to push and pull the stick. It's important that you only use your fingers and keep your wrist stationary. French grip will yield fast and subtle strokes. Morello, (2006) describes finger control as the final coat of polish on a piece of furniture. French grip is extremely important when learning finger control and is something that we will outline in detail in chapter 4.

American Grip



Lastly, the American grip is a cross between German and French grip. Your palms are in-between facing the floor and facing one another (Natelli, n.d.). The American grip is an extremely useful grip because it is a very natural hand position. The stick is moved with the wrists and with the help of the fingers. I personally spend most of my time in the American grip as it feels most natural to me. It's important to learn and experiment with all three grips. You never know when a piece of music will require the finesse of French grip but then need the power of German grip in an upcoming passage.

A final piece of the puzzle when it comes to proper grip and playing mechanics is setting up the height of your snare drum. In accordance with (James & Morello, 2019), your snare drum whether you are sitting or standing should stand an inch or two below your belly button.

Standard Setup



Tilted Setup



It's also important to tilt your snare drum if you are a traditional grip player. As mentioned by (Jain, 2007), traditional grip was created to accommodate a titled marching snare. If you want the grip to work to the best of its abilities, tilting the snare is essential. In my personal experience, playing traditional grip with a level snare drum can lead to soreness in the shoulder. If you are a matched grip player, simply keep the snare as level as possible.

In the next chapter we will be discussing George Lawrence Stone's famous level system. This system will break down every stroke a percussionist can make with a drumstick. This system will also cover how to play louder and softer and how to develop a smooth striking motion with the drumstick.

Chapter Two: *The Level System*

*The level system is an efficient way of playing the snare drum that allows the percussionist to position their sticks in an advantageous position. Before we discuss the level system further, let's talk about the man who created it, George Lawrence Stone. George Lawrence Stone was born on November 1st, 1886, in South Boston (Stone, 2009). George's father, George Burt Stone, was also a percussionist and started manufacturing his own percussion equipment in 1890. Having been captivated by percussion at a young age George Lawrence Stone pursued his passion into his teens, becoming the youngest member at 16 years of age to join the musician's union. George played in several groups including solo xylophone with the Keith Vaudeville Circuit, a spot in the Boston Grand Opera Company, and a tenure with Boston's Colonial Theater to name a few. In 1933, he became a founding member of NARD, the National Association of Rudimentary Drummers. Throughout his life George taught percussion, judged competitions, composed articles on drumming, and composed five renowned books on music. George's crowning jewel of his writing career was his legendary book *Stick Control for the Snare Drummer*, published in 1935 (Stone, 2009). In 1967, George passed away at the age of 81. In 1997, he was posthumously inducted in the (PSA) Percussion Arts Society Hall of Fame. He lived a tremendous life and changed the landscape of percussion forever.*

George Lawrence Stone had a unique view on percussion. In George's opinion, far too many percussionists produced playing of a "rough-and-ready variety", lacking the technical ability of say a classically trained violinist (Stone, 2009). George claimed that many individuals viewed the drums as an instrument that was easy to play. An instrument that didn't require hard work and practice. George argued that to become a master percussionist, one had to "keep in shape" (Stone, 2009). To stay in shape, George created his famous Stick Control book, a book designed to be a "conditioner" for one's hands. George preached relaxation and tension free playing, advising stoppage at the slightest twinge of fatigue or discomfort. In George's opinion, a lack of relaxation was what held percussionists back from mastering their instrument. Through hours of hard work and training, complete relaxation could be achieved, resulting in percussion becoming as easy as drawing a breath.

Now that we've discussed the importance of staying loose and keeping our hands in shape, let's talk about the level system. The level system is an assortment of categorized stick heights that will allow the percussionist to be in position to play any sticking pattern. Louder accents and dynamic levels are achieved through higher stick heights, and softer playing is achieved through lower stick heights. By using this system, players will never have to disrupt the flow of music (Johnson, 2012). This system promotes relaxed playing and is essential in developing wrist control, avoiding injury, and achieving dynamic and rudimental mastery.

Brief Level System Overview

The level system consists of four different strokes: the full stroke, the downstroke, the tap stroke, and the upstroke (Johnson, 2012). The full stroke is designed to create a loud and consistent sound. To transition to a softer tone, a downstroke can be played to get the stick lower to the drumhead. Once a downstroke has been played, a tap stroke can be used to perform soft strokes an inch or two off the drumhead. Lastly, an upstroke can be used to transition from a tap stroke position to a full stroke position. This is great for transitioning from softer to louder playing.



Full Stroke



The full stroke starts in an elevated position with the tip of the drumstick pointing towards the ceiling. The stroke is executed with a firm wrist turn. Remember, a well-executed wrist stroke comes from a “knocking on the door” motion with matched grip, and a “turning of a doorknob” motion with traditional grip. The object of the full stroke is to have the drumstick start high and end high. As the stick is propelled downward, it will strike the drumhead, rebounding back to its initial starting position. The stick will use the same force that was used to propel it downward, to rebound back up. A properly executed full stroke will produce a louder tone and is useful for generating accented notes as well as playing at a louder dynamic level. This technique may be challenging at first, but it’s vital to learn if you want to master this system. Mastering this stroke is achieved through a relaxed drum grip. Stay loose and allow your wrist to move with the rebound of the stick, not against it.

Full Stroke Cont.

This process is known as “accepting the rebound” (Johnson, 2012). The saving grace with this technique is that it’s impossible to forget once you master it. You’ll know you’re closing in on a breakthrough when you start to feel a jolt of energy in your hand. This is an indicator that you’re letting the stick rebound uninhibited.

Downstroke



Now that we’ve discussed the full stroke, let’s discuss the downstroke. A downstroke is exactly what it sounds like, a stroke that travels “down” from a high position to a low position (Johnson, 2012). In other words, the stick travels from high to low. Instead of letting the stick rebound as we would a full stroke, we simply close our hand, keeping the stick contained an inch or two above the drumhead. Although we are transitioning from a high to low position, a downstroke is just as loud as a full stroke.

Downstroke Cont.

In fact, the challenging aspect of a downstroke is making sure that it has the same dynamic level as a full stroke. You want both your downstroke and your full stroke to have the same sound.

Tap stroke



Now that we've covered the downstroke, let's discuss the tap stroke. A tap stroke is a simple low to low level change. Your stick starts low and ends low. Tap strokes can vary in height but typically reside an inch or two off the drumhead (Johnson, 2012). As you may have guessed, a tap stroke starting low and ending low means that it has a softer tone. Think of a tap stroke as a mini full stroke, the stick strikes the drumhead, letting it rebound back to its initial starting position. As you aren't starting as high as a full stroke, your stick will only rebound as high as its initial starting position. In this case, only a few inches off the drum.

Upstroke



Lastly, we have what is quite possibly the most misunderstood stroke in the level system, the upstroke. Much like the downstroke, the upstroke is intuitively named. With an upstroke, we are traveling “upward” from a low position to a high position (Johnson, 2012). The upstroke is great if we need to get from a tap stroke position to a full stroke position. This is especially useful in rudimental playing. In just a few moments we will review how to use the level system to approach the playing of a double paradiddle. To play a proper upstroke, we start in a low position and play a tap stroke. Instead of letting our tap stroke rebound to its starting height, we use the small amount of rebound that’s been generated and use our wrist to pull the stick into a full stroke position. In this instance, the wrist can be used to help move the stick upwards. As we are starting low and ending high, an upstroke will always produce a softer tone.

Rudimental Application

Now that we've covered all four strokes in the level system, let's look at how it can be applied to rudimental playing. For this example, let's apply the level system to the double paradiddle. The rudiment uses all four strokes of the level system and is a great example of how useful the level system can be. The sticking for a double paradiddle is follows:

FTDUTT, FTDUTT

RLRLRR, LRLRLL

*Legend: F = Full stroke, D = Downstroke, T = Tap Stroke, U = Upstroke
R = Right Hand, L = Left Hand*

Note how the level system prepares your stick heights for each stroke. The accents of the rudiment are played with a full stroke followed by a down stroke. The down stroke puts you in position to play the upcoming tap stroke. The “diddle”, the two consecutive “rights and lefts”, are played with a tap stroke followed by an upstroke. The upstroke allows an easy transition to a full stroke position. This change in height will allow you to reset and play the rudiment from the top once more.

Changing Dynamics Rapidly

In music, we often get louder and softer to make our music more expressive. If music was always played at the same volume, it would become stale and boring. To be more expressive, we have several dynamic markers at our disposal. As mentioned in our overview of the level system, we discussed that higher stick heights generate a louder sound, and lower stick heights generate a softer sound. This is great for executing accented and unaccented notes. An aspect of the level system that we haven't discussed yet is the process of fine-tuning dynamics (Johnson, 2012).

The stick height will create the dynamic that is desired, and the velocity of the stick being thrust downward will “fine tune” the dynamic (Johnson, 2012). Please note that we are still staying loose and letting gravity do most of the work. Just because we are using more power from our wrist to generate a louder stroke does not mean that we are creating tension by swinging for the fences.

At softer dynamic levels, pianissimo, and piano, we keep our stick heights and velocity low. At moderate dynamic levels, mezzo piano and mezzo forte, we keep our stick heights high and our velocity low. Lastly, louder dynamics such as forte and fortissimo require high stick heights and high velocity (Johnson, 2012).



Changing Dynamics Gradually

The level system can also be used to change dynamics gradually during a stream of notes. In music, there are two terms that you want to familiarize yourself with; crescendo, and decrescendo. A crescendo means to increase the volume of your playing, your sticks will start in the tap stroke position before slowly increasing in height to a full stroke position (Johnson, 2012). As the sticks increase in height, they will produce a louder sound.

To decrescendo, you are doing the opposite, decreasing in volume instead of increasing (Johnson, 2012). A decrescendo is also known as a diminuendo. When decreasing in volume, the sticks will start in a full stroke position before slowly descending to that of a low tap stroke. The decrease in height will grant a gradual reduction in sound.

Now that we've discussed the level system, we can explore the Moeller technique. The Moeller system is an approach to playing the snare drum that uses a player's forearms to generate a powerful whipping motion. This system is also used to generate accents and can serve as an alternative to the level system.

Chapter Three: *The Moeller System*

To start off this chapter, let's reference the most cliché talking point in drumming history, the bouncing ball. Put simply, a bouncing ball is no different than a bouncing drumstick. If you can conceptualize how someone controls the bounce of a basketball, you can come to terms with how one controls a bouncing drumstick. If you were to drop a basketball on the pavement the ball would continue to bounce, losing more and more steam until refusing to move. Depending on how high you drop the ball, you're likely to receive three to four bounces. This same observation can be applied to the Moeller technique. In the Moeller system, a drumstick is brought to an elevated height before being dropped. Once the stick is dropped, multiple "free bounces" can be achieved by letting the stick bounce and controlling the bounces with the hand. Much like the level system, The Moeller technique has a rich history, a history that in my opinion will increase your appreciation and subsequent proficiency of this fascinating technique.



Stanford A. Moeller

Stanford A. Moeller was born on 1879 in Albany New York (J. Chapin, 1992, personal interview, as cited in, Logozzo, 1992). As a child, Moeller had not yet discovered his passion for percussion and started his musical journey as a piano player. It wasn't until he was a young man that a pair of sticks made their way into his hands. Moeller honed his percussive talent by studying with various drum teachers. After a stint as a serviceman in the Spanish American War, Moeller decided to relocate to New York City. In 1925, Moeller became a touring musician, exposing himself to various jazz and rudimental drummers (Moeller, 1989, as cited in, Logozzo, 1992). For Moeller, this was an eye-opening experience, revealing to him the many similarities that numerous drummers shared involving their technique. Through years of practice and experimentation, Moeller began to develop his own drumming system, assigning names to techniques that he observed, crafted, and refined. Students of Stanford Moeller eventually began calling his techniques the Moeller system (J. Chapin, 1992, personal interview, as cited in Logozzo). As Moeller was passionate about sharing his knowledge, he gave private lessons in Queens and Mt. Vernon New York (T. Andrews, 1992, telephone interview, as cited in Logozzo). He also created colonial style drums and produced his own drumsticks. Throughout his life, Moeller taught many well-known drummers such as Jim Chapin, Gene Krupa, and Allen Paley. Moeller passed away in 1961, a true legend and technical innovator in the world of drumming.

Basic Moeller Stroke, (Matched Grip)



According to (Chapin, 1992), the key to mastering the Moeller technique resides in loose and relaxed playing. The way to achieve relaxed playing stems from a relaxed drum grip. As explained by Jim Chapin, the stick should be grasped with the same delicacy that one would use when handling a “fledgling bird”. If one squeezes the little bird too tightly, the bird will get injured. Conversely, a grip that isn’t firm enough will allow the bird to fly away. Once a loose grip has been established, the basic Moeller stroke can start to be developed. The Moeller stroke is often referred to as a fluid whipping motion, very similar to the motion involved in cracking a bull whip. The stroke is generated by moving your elbow away from your body. As this occurs, make sure to keep your wrist loose and disengaged. As your elbow is moving away from your body, the tip of the drumstick should be pointing downward.

The top of your wrist should also be raised, creating the pose of a cobra getting ready to strike. To complete the motion, move your elbow back towards your body. As this motion is completed, the drumstick will drop onto the drumhead. This dropping motion will create a loud and powerful accent.

Basic Moeller Stroke, (Traditional Grip)



The Moeller stroke can also be performed with the traditional grip. The main motion stays the same as the elbow moves away and then back towards the body. The difference resides in the angle of the wrist. According to (Morello, 2006), the Moeller stroke for traditional grip is a lot like shaking water off your hands.

Down Strokes, Tap Strokes, and Up Strokes

In the Moeller system, three types of strokes exist, down strokes, tap strokes, and up strokes (Chapin, 1992). Please note that these strokes are not the same strokes from the level system.

Downstroke



The downstroke is a stroke in which the stick is traveling in a downward fashion (Chapin, 1992). The basic Moeller stroke that we discussed is in fact a downstroke. At first, we practiced the stroke in a vacuum, performing it over and over to become comfortable with the “whipping motion”. With enough practice, this seemingly awkward motion will become second nature, allowing for strong and effortless accenting.

Tap Stroke

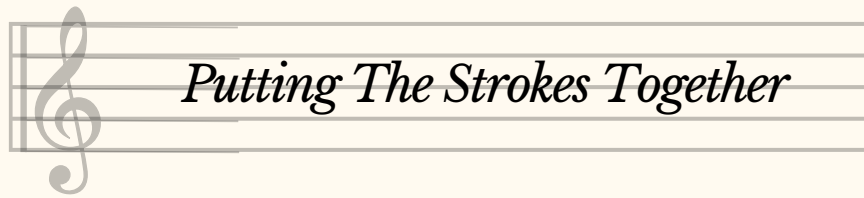


The tap stroke in the Moeller system is similar to the tap stroke in the level system. Both strokes are a low-to-low stroke that start an inch or two off the drum and end an inch or two off the drum. What separates the Moeller tap stroke from the level system tap stroke is that at quicker tempos, the Moeller tap strokes becomes a controlled bounce (Chapin, 1992). We will elaborate more on this shortly.

Upstroke



The upstroke is the most intriguing stroke in the Moeller system. The stroke gets its name from the stick traveling in an upward fashion. What makes this stroke different from the level system version is that the stick is pulled upward with the forearm, not the wrist. As the elbow moves away from the body, the stick “hits while moving away” (Chapin, 1992). In other words, the stick creates a note on the drum as it is being pulled upward by the forearm. This stroke is extremely important as it gives the percussionist a hit on the drum all the while getting the stick back in position to administer another downstroke.



Putting The Strokes Together

Now that we've discussed the three strokes that make up the Moeller system, let's discuss how to use them in sync with one another. A three-note grouping known as a triplet is often used to practice all three strokes in the Moeller system (Chapin, 1992). An eight-note triplet can be counted as follows, one-trip-let, two-trip-let, three-trip-let, four-trip-let. A convenient aspect of the Moeller system is that each stroke can be assigned to a different part of the triplet (Chapin, 1992). For example, a downstroke can be played on the "one", a tap stroke can be played on the "trip" and an up stroke can be played on the "let". By assigning each stroke to a different part of the triplet, a continuous sequence of notes can be played (Chapin, 1992). To start this sequence of notes, a downstroke is performed on the "one" creating an accent. Once this has been achieved, a tap stroke with the wrist can be played on the "trip". Lastly, an upstroke is performed, getting the stick in a downstroke position while still achieving a sound. This can be played on the "let". By playing each note in a triplet-based fashion, "down, tap, up", this series of notes can be played indefinitely.



The Moeller Triplet

Now that we've discussed how each stroke in the Moeller system can be assigned to a different part of a triplet, let's talk about how we can use both of our hands to create what's known as a hand-to-hand triplet (Chapin, 1992). If we were to play a triplet with one hand, we would simply play it with three tap strokes. Although this has its place in percussion, let's say that we want to switch things up and use both of our hands. This sticking pattern would look like this:

DUTDUT, DUTDUT
RLRLRL, LRLRLR

*Legend: D = Downstroke, T = Tap Stroke, U = Upstroke
R = Right Hand, L = Left Hand*

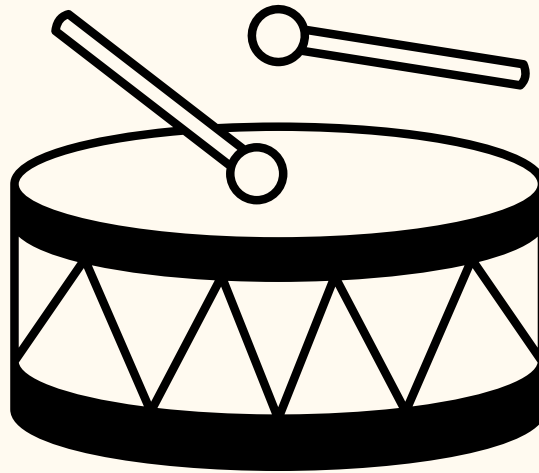
Notice how these notes are all unaccented. To play this sticking pattern in true Moeller fashion, let's apply what we've learned about the different kinds of strokes. If the triplet is a right-hand lead, the first R will always be a downstroke with the first L being an upstroke. If the triplet is a left-hand lead, The first L will be a downstroke and the first R will be an upstroke. The Tap strokes will simply fill in when needed. Remember that a downstroke in the Moeller system is always an accent.

The Level System Revisited

As mentioned in chapter 3, the level system can also be used to play hand to hand triplets. To break down the triplet using the level system play a downstroke on the “one”. Once this has been achieved, play an upstroke on the “trip”. Finish off the triplet by playing a tap stroke on the “let”. Remember that the level system will always start in a full stroke position for both a right hand and left-hand lead.

DUTDUT, DUTDUT
RLRLRL, LRLRLR

*Legend: F = Full stroke, D = Downstroke, T = Tap Stroke, U = Upstroke
R = Right Hand, L = Left Hand*



Chapter Four: *Finger Control*

In the sport of golf, switching clubs to accommodate different situations is a huge part of the game. If you need to hit the ball far, you use a driver. If you need to save yourself from a pesky sand trap, you use a wedge. Lastly, you may be faced with a short game situation. In this instance, a putter would be the most appropriate. By covering the Moeller Method and the level system, we've discussed how to use our wrists and forearms to generate power. In essence, our wrists and forearms serve as our driver, allowing for power and distance. Conversely, putting draws parallels to finger control. If we need to only move our ball a couple feet, we need finesse, not power. Percussion is no different, when finesse is required, our fingers are the best tool for the job. Much like the Moeller method and the level system, finger control is rooted in a rich history.





Billy Gladestone

When people discuss finger control, Billy Gladestone is usually the name that comes to mind. Billy Gladestone was born in 1892 on Dec. 15th (T. Reed, 1992 telephone interview, as cited in Logozzo, 1992). Unlike Stanford Moeller and George Lawrence Stone, Gladestone was born in Romania, not the United States. He and his parents immigrated to the USA when he was eleven years old. Gladestone started playing his first instrument at the age of seven (T. Reed, telephone interview, 1992, as cited in Logozzo, 1992). It was a baritone horn. On top of his horn playing, Gladestone was cited as being a gifted piano player and showed an early interest in percussion. In the late 1920's, Gladestone started playing music professionally. It wasn't until 1932 however, that he started gaining a reputation as being a stellar percussionist. Aside from performing, Gladestone was a gifted educator and loved sharing his knowledge with anyone that was interested in learning. Some of his most notable students were Shelly Manne, Joe Morello, and Ted Reed (J. Chapin, 1992, telephone interview, as cited in Logozzo, 1992). Billy Gladestone was also a famous inventor, having over 40 patents to his name. Throughout his life, Gladestone produced his own drumsticks, mallets, and highly sought-after snare drums. Gladestone passed away in 1961, another huge contributor to the world of percussion.

The Flying Fingers Technique

In the world of finger control, the first technique that we will discuss is the flying fingers technique, a technique that Billy Gladstone pioneered. The flying fingers approach refers to a method in which the percussionist propels the stick up and down with their bottom fingers. This technique is used to play fast and low volume streams of notes (Morello, 2006). In the Gladstone system, this technique can be compared to that of how a piano creates a sound. As recalled by (Reed, 1981), the process of a piano hammer striking a string is a great parallel. As the drumstick is struck by the fingers, the stick is pulled into the drumhead, creating a sound.

Traditional Grip

With traditional grip, the stick is controlled solely with the index finger. Much like matched grip, we start off in a tap stroke position.



Traditional Grip Cont.

Turn your wrist and perform a wrist stroke. As the stick bounces back up, propel the stick back down by pulling in your index finger. This motion is similar to pulling the trigger on a firearm (Morello, 2006). Much like the matched grip version, the stick can be bounced like a ball indefinitely.

Matched Grip

This technique is played in French grip (Morello, 2006). As a best practice, you can start to get comfortable with finger control by using gravity as a practice tool (Coash, 2021). To perform this exercise, hold your stick in French grip. Once this has been accomplished, move your arm upwards so that your drumstick is at ear level.





Matched Grip Cont.

At this point your stick should be turned over with your fingers pointing towards the ceiling. Once you've achieved this, open and close your hand. By performing this motion, you will start to train your muscles to get comfortable with keeping the stick and fingers in unison. A common mistake that percussionists make when developing this technique involves losing finger contact with the stick. This will create tension and impede your progress. Once you've gotten comfortable opening and closing your hands with your stick upside down, revert your hand back to the standard French grip position. At this point, try opening and closing your hand with your stick upright. This will be much harder to achieve without the aid of gravity. Once you've mastered this, you can now move this technique to the snare. To begin, start off in German or American grip in the tap stroke position. Once your grip is set, perform a wrist stroke. As the stick rebounds up, move to the French grip and don't close your hand. Instead, use your bottom fingers to pull the stick back down, bouncing the stick like a basketball (Famularo, 2019). Much like the Moeller method, this technique will start a sequence of notes that can be played indefinitely. It's important that you use your fingers for this technique and not your wrist. In the French grip position, moving your wrist in a vertical fashion can cause serious injury.

The Push Pull Technique

The second technique that can be played using finger control is the push pull technique. This is a technique that uses the wrist and fingers in conjunction with one another to play quick successions of notes (Knudtson, 2017). On the snare drum, the push pull technique is vital for playing double stroke rolls with speed and clarity (Morello, 2006).

Matched Grip



To develop this technique for matched grip, perform a wrist stroke starting in the full stroke position. Instead of accepting the rebound in traditional full stroke fashion, keep your hand open and allow the stick to propel upwards (Walsh, 2020). The stick will now be residing in the fleshy webbing that exists between your index finger and thumb. Throughout this process, make sure that your hand and wrist are pointing downward.

Matched Grip Cont.

Each time you perform this motion, reset the position of your stick and hand. Practice this exercise until you can consistently get a full bounce from the stick while keeping your wrist facing downward. Once this becomes second nature, you can now add your fingers to the technique.



Begin in a tap stroke position. Play a wrist stroke and let the stick push the fingers open. The stick and fingers should always remain in contact with one another. The wrist should be facing downward, and the fingers should be kicked out. (Knudtson, 2017) refers to this as the “little v”, referring to the shape that is formed with the back of the hand and the drumstick. To complete the push pull sequence, simply close your hand. By closing your hand, the stick will be pulled down towards the drum, creating a sound before snapping back to its original starting position. Knudtson refers to this position as the “big v”.

Traditional Grip

Push pull with traditional grip has the same mechanics as the matched grip version. With traditional grip, start the “push” phase in a tap stroke position before performing a wrist stroke (Morello, 2006). At this time, your bottom two fingers will curl inward, your top two fingers will point upward, and your thumb will stay in the same place. For the “pull” phase, pull in your index finger. This motion is the same as the one used with the flying fingers technique. Your bottom two fingers will also help to perform a mini upstroke, helping to push the stick upwards as it generates a hit on the drum.





Push Pull and the Double Stroke Roll

As mentioned, the push pull technique is great for performing a double stroke roll.

The sticking for the double stroke roll is played as follows:

RRLLRRLL or LLRRLLRR

R = Right Hand Sticking

L = Left Hand Sticking

The length of this roll can be played for an indefinite period and can start with either the right or left hand. At slower tempos the roll is played using only tap strokes. To speed up the roll, wrist strokes alone will not be adequate. According to (Morello, 2006), the only way to play a double stroke roll with speed is by incorporating your fingers. To play a double stroke using the push pull method, simply open your hand on your first R, and close your hand on your second R. Repeat this process with your left hand, L. If you start off your double stroke roll with your left hand, the process is the same. Open your hand on your first L and close your hand on your second L. As one hand performs a double, the other hand rests, poised to spring into action when needed.

Conclusion

As our time together comes to an end, I hope that you enjoyed this journey through the history of snare drum technique. What has intrigued me about this wonderful instrument is that it is often underestimated. Much like George Lawrence Stone, I also feel that most people view percussion as being loud and devoid of delicacy. With this book, I hope I can educate drummers and non-drummers alike on the technique and discipline that is required to master this instrument. For all my readers, thank you for taking this journey with me. As someone who loves percussion, it brings me great joy to share my passion with others. As I bid you a farewell, remember to stay passionate, dedicated, and to always enjoy yourself.





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